Menace and Fear In Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*

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Abstract:

Menace and fear play a vital role in Harold Pinter's plays. They are recurrent themes throughout the thematic construction of his plays. Pinter thinks that these feelings spring from within human beings. It is a matter of critical circumstances one may pass through. They are not only external elements that come from sinister people but also these things embodied within. The present paper tackles Pinter's The Birthday Party which trying to show the reason behind his fear which springs from his minority as a Jew.

المستخلص

يلعب الخـــوف والتهديد دوراً حيويـــاً فـــــي مسرحيات هارولد بنتر, وهـي أفكـــار متكررة نجدها جلية في البناء الفكري لمسرحياته . ويعتقد بنتر أن هذه المشاعر تنبع من مكنون النفس البشرية , وهي قضية تسببها الظروف القاهرة . حيث انها ليست عناصر خارجية تأتي من الناس الأشرار فحسب بل تتجسد فـي اغوار النفس البشرية. يتقصى البحث الحالي أسباب هذا التهديد والخوف فـــي مسرحية بنتر حفلة عيد ميلاد الذي ينبع من أصولة اليهودية.

1. Introduction

The making of modern Drama is the consequence of group activity. No single playwright or nation can claim to the creation of the drama of our day. It emerged as a complex and dynamic expression of modem life. Modern drama is far from preaching .It comes as a reaction of bad circumstances of modern life. The playwrights such as Pinter, O'Neill and Shaw " were preoccupied with vital issues"(1) of modern life.

No doubt, the twentieth century has witnessed fundamental changes in almost all fields of life . The romantic view of life is superseded by chaos and perplexity. These circumstances found their echoes in the literature of the period. However, the modern drama is an American phenomena. In the second decade of the twentieth century, attempts were made to deal with the actual problems of modern society and to avoid the romantic view of life .Therefore, the Modern stage presents a modern man, who is lost and alienated , as a hopeless creature in a destructed community. The works of modern writers reveal the fact that the world where we live" is not a pleasant little nest made for our protection, but a vast and a largely hostile environment (2)

Accordingly, the exploitation of the theatrical conventions of symbolism, realism and expressionism made the modern schools of drama with the adoption of the psychological theories in motivating the action of the characters become a visible feature of modern drama. This shows that the dramatists take modern society as a subject matter to dig deep into the uprooted problems of such society and diagnose the sickness caused by the " collapse of spiritual values and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying"(3) solutions to the dilemmas of modern life.

Harold Pinter, as a modern playwright, is bitterly impressed by the bad factors of modern life. So, he describes modern man as one who is suffering from mysterious nightmares.

Harold Pinter was born in London in 1930. He is a renowned playwright and screen writer. His plays are particularly famous for their use of understatement to convey characters thoughts and feelings. In 2005, pinter was awarded the Nobel prize for literature.

2. Fear & Menace in Pinter's Life and Works

Harold Pinter was a writer and a political activist. Inspired by Samuel Beckett, he created his own style, marked by terse dialogue and meaningful pauses. Pinter was the son of Jewish tailor. He grew up in a lower middle- class neighborhood in London. In his grammar school year, Pinter was athletic and especially fond of playing cricket.

During the World War II, Pinter witnessed the bad circumstances of the war. He experiences the bombing of his city by the Germans .He was sent away to escape the Blitz at one point. This experience of war and destruction left incurable impression on Pinter. At the age of 18, he refused to enlist in the military as part of his national service.

Pinter started out as an actor. After studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art for a time, he worked in a regional theater in the 1950s and sometimes used the stage name David Baron. Pinter wrote a short play, The Room, in 1957, and went onto creating his first full- length drama, The Birth Day Party. The Birth day party pre mired in London in 1958 to savage reviews and was closed within a week. One critic , Harold Hobson of The Sunday Times of London , offered a dissenting opinion, writing that Pinter was" the most original , disturbing and

arresting talent in theatrical London,[4] according to the Los Angeles Times

Pinter wrote so many plays which achieved success. Among those plays are The Care Taker(1960) and his master work, The Homecoming(1965). He also wrote The Servant (1963) and Accident (1967). Pinter also presented One For the Road (1984). In all his plays, he tries to give his view of world. He describes world as a dark place shrouded by mystery and fear. Throughout his style, Pinter wants his readers and audience to become aware of the bloody circumstances around them . His mentality is shaped by the outcomes in the fate of human beings. He is sensitive and pessimistic at the same time.

Pinter's view of fear is highly connected with his childhood. The most formative year of his personal life has a strong influence on his play writing.

Therefore, it was during those years that Pinter received an education that tainted the innocence of his childhood . Pinter explores his awareness of his own mortality in his play:

> When Pinter began his play writing career In 1957, however, one idea was fore most in his Mind as a major theme :fear As young Jew living through the early days of world war II, he had gone to had afraid that he might be A wakened in the night by a knock at the door And that he and his parents would be taken Forcibly from their home by unknown assailants, picture vividly impressed on his mind by tales of Hitler's Germany[5].

With that fear continually haunting him, Pinter reveals different events that could take place if the authorities did arrive at the door and seize their victims, and each event becomes one of Pinter's published plays .

So, it is significant to reiterate that many of the defining qualities of Pinter's plays are a direct result of a world that he grew up. In Austin E. Quigley's "The language problem" Quigley suggests that Pinter's experience as a minority Jewish person influenced his employment of menace in his plays. Quigley's shows that Pinter discovered that he had to try on a verbal defense to protect himself :

> I went to a Jewish club, an old railway Arch, and there were quite a lot of people Often waiting with broken milk bottles in a particular alley we used to walk through. There were two ways of getting out of it- one was a purely Physical way, of course, but you couldn't do Anything about the milk bottles- we didn't have Any milk bottles. The best way was to talk to them.[(6)]

3. Fear & Menace in Pinter's <u>The Birthday Party</u>

Pinter's <u>The Birthday Party</u> reflects truly his fear and the need for résistance. It reveals "how prevalent anti-Semitism still was in the 1950s. The play demonstrates how Pinter himself instinctively resisted any form of appression. Above all, it shows how Pinter was able to divorce his private identification with Jewish suffering from his public critique Jewish tradition"[(7)].

The Birthday Party is apolitical play about the need for resistance. Pinter depicts the world of fear and menace within a setting of a birth day party for Stanley, the main character, just as the Nazis depicted the concentration camps as "Jewish vacations" to the rest of the world. Within these euphemisms , the only thing that exists is the victimization and domination of innocent people.

Esslin states"

> Words become weapons in the mouth of Pinter's Characters. The one who gets hold of the more elaborate or more accurate expression Established dominance over his partner. The victim of aggression can be swamped by Language which comes too thick and fast, Or is too non sensual to be comprehended, This happens, above all, to Stanley in The birthday party, who is subjected to a process of brainwashing through a torrent of incomprehensible Questions and assertion fired at him by the two terrorists.(8)

Here, Stanley becomes an easy target for those two men. If any of the characters in the play are vaguely aware of what is going on, they do not do anything to stop it. Perhaps, they are scared and that fear drives them to furna blind eye to what is happening. This could be considered a comment on each and every person who was unable to do anything to help his race in the face of the Nazi party.

The Birthday Party is set in boarding house run by Meg and Petey where Stanley Webber, musician, is the sole occupant. Stanley, shabby looking man in his late 30's, is hinted to have asexual relation with her landlady Meg. The boarding house is claustrophobic, dirty and

suffocating. Stanley shows relent when he is informed by peaty about the arrival of Some guests who will stay with them. But before Stanley can do any fining the guest are there. The intruders cloudberry and Me (an arrive , as it becomes clear later in pursuit of Stanley denies , and she plans to throw a party which is followed by a game of blind man's bluff that reveals situation, characteristics and personalities that language fails to communicate. The play ends with Stanley taken away by Goldberg and McCann to be dealt by some man called Monty. In spite of traditional three act division, as implied plot, the play opens up to absurdity when the reader Seeks reason behind the action and is not provided for. This is exactly where the play becomes both menacing and disturbing, leaving readers and incidence de living in the possibilities of inter predation that may transpire.

In this concern, Pinter had once said "I think we communicate only too well in our Silence, in what is unsaid …." [(9)] For Pinter, language that people use in life is attempt to cover up or evade the truth

Thus, the Birthday Party is a dramatization of this horror of never being able to come clean from the smoke screen of words. The horror of continual is a vision, of desperate attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves, the horror when "communication becomes too alarming"[(10)]. Language in Pinter's play is deception; it leads to nihilism, chaos futility and fear.

Throughout the play , it is foreshadowed that visitors will arrive at Meg and Petey's bed and Brent fast. The entrance Gold Berg, Me and Ann are anticipated. In the text, Petey mentions that two men on the beach heed inquired about their place and as Stanley is tanning Meg about the arrival of these men who are coming in a van with wheel barrow the knock at the door announces their arrival yet despite their expected Entrance Stanley does not do anything to protect himself Austin.

E. Quigley's article "The Language Problem" explains that Stanley is confronted by two Visitors,who overcome his self –confronted by employing silence nor by concentrating on an inefficient use of language They verbally bludgeon him into submission and silence by the sheer number and variety of theirs.[11]

4. Conclusion

So, The Birthday Party faithfully mirrors Pinter's fear of future. In other words, the mystery which is a distinctive feature of his play reflects the corruption of the world where he lives.

It discussed that the main source of fear in Pinter's plays come from his dark view of life . He looks at life as absurd, meaningless and futile .

Therefore, his plays do not only reveal his feelings of his Jewish heritage , but also provide us with a repertoire of plays that explore the struggle to be heard, to make a difference. It stimulates people to revolt against bad circumstances of life. Pinter has masks the powerful struggle in domestic setting in his earlier plays but in his mordent work he reached a level of shouting that cannot be ignored.

However, in one way or another, the main chapter of The Birthday Party represents the creator himself. Stanley is an artist who looks for ideal society. He wants to escape because of futility of modern life.

Notes

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2- Orrin E . Klapp " Tragedy and the American Climate " in Robert w. corrigan , ed , Tragedy : vision and Form (California : (handed publishing (0,1965), p.302.

3- Eric Bently , " Trying to like U, Neil " in U, Neil and his play: Four De cades of Crtism,ed o. Oscar Cargill (New york : new york U. p , 1961) , p . 340.

4- www, biography . come / people / Harold–pinter. (Harold pinter Biography- fact, Bitrth day, lif story) . Retrieved in 15 /3/ 2013.

5- Sylvan H. Gale, Butter's Going UP : A critical Analysis of Harold Pinter's work (Boston : G. K . Hall & co ., 1990) , p . 18 .

6- Austin E. Quigley , " The language problem " ,critical Essays on Harold Pinter, ed . Steven H. Gale (Boston : G. K . Hall & (o , 1990) , p . 279 ,

7- Michael Billing on , The life and work of Harold Pinter (London : Faber and Faber Ltd , 1996) , p . 81 .

8- Martin Esslin, Pinter : A study of his play (London : Eyre Methuen, 1977) , p . 49 .

9- Harlod Pinter The Birthday party : comedy of Menace (London : Faber and Faber Ltd . , 1991) , p . 132 .

10- Quigley, p . 289.

11- Ibid.

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